Ext

Dominion parallels in Self-Rule

Sunday News

Bermuda

Sorted by D. T. Rees

Fitness for Self-Rule

Dominion Parallels - Their Claims Examined.

By D. V. S.

Sunday News Section D. T. Rao. 30-12-39

Although no responsible Indian or impartial foreigner now says that India is unfit for Swaraj, there are still some who continue to repeat the parrot-like slogan "India is not yet fit". The argument that is often advanced is that India is not a nation it is a continent containing a medley of communities having different traditions and cultures and thoroughly ignorant, illiterate and unable to understand or exercise their vote, and finally that the communal tension and the problem of minorities is a chinese wall separating India from Swaraj. Figures are freely quoted from statistical abstracts.

England in 19th century.

Any student of history is tempted to retort that judged by the above standards no country which now enjoys self-Government or international status as a free nation was ever fit for Swaraj at any given period of its history. Let us take the case of England in the 19th century. The new conditions that made England the mistress of the Dominions beyond the seas, the vast wealth, the scientific progress, the town life and factory system brought in their train evils the mitigation of which had been the chief concern of all statesmen and reformers in England since 1832. A commission which was appointed in 1840 found that people had never heard of London or of America, of Jesus Christ or of God except in an oath, and it was reckoned that of the boys and girls thirteen or fourteen years old, half could not read and nearly three quarters could not write.

The masses were ignorant and superstitious. Grinding poverty, insanitary conditions and the unscrupulousness of the capitalistic classes reduced the peasant and the worker to a state of semi-slavery. Epidemics and unnatural offences showed the depravity of society. Masses were entirely in the hands of landlords and capitalists. Politically they did not care to know or exercise their franchise. The rotten borough was the standing

The representative councils of the people from the borough to the parliament were packed. Country gentlemen and landlords and lords manipulated the vote, and dominated the parliament. The peasant and the worker was nowhere. Such was the Free England of the 19th century. Did all these things unfit the people of England for Democracy? History has recorded the answer.

From 1832 onwards the statesmen of England had striven and strained hard to set right matters. Factory laws, social legislation and electoral reforms had transformed the social and political conditions of England. Yet, neither the foremost men of the West like Judge Lindsay and Dean Inge nor the social worker in the East-end of London can say that everything is O. K. Even to-day we hear about the power of the capitalist and the helplessness of the labourer. Unemployment and the most serious evils that go in its train are disturbing the social equilibrium in the country. It is admitted that the present day Parliament does not really represent the nation nor its divergent political or social groups. Does anybody say that England is unfit for the Democracy it enjoys?

U. S. A.

A study of the United states of America at the time of the Declaration of Independence reveals the same defects in social and political life. It was full of greedy adventurers. People were ignorant, vain and discontented. The vast majority were illiterate, only two per cent being literate. In 1814 too, there was no safety for life or property. Slavery of the worst type was prevalent in the land. Inequalities of wealth and social position made matters worse. Scholarship and merchandise were alike conspicuous by their absence. Government was inefficient. Yet America became free in 1766. A cursory perusal of Lajpat Rai's Unhappy India shows that America is not even now free from the social evils

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The masses were ignorant and superstitious. Grinding poverty, insanitary conditions and the unscrupulousness of the capitalistic classes reduced the peasant and the worker to a state of semi-slavery. Epidemics and unnatural offences showed the depravity of society. Masses were entirely in the hands of landlords and capitalists. Politically they did not care to know or exercise their franchise. The rotten borough was the standing monument to the exploitation of the masses by the richer people. Corruption, bribery, jobbery and patronage were the order of the day, both in social and political affairs. The representative councils of the people from the borough to the parliament were packed. Country gentlemen and landlords and lords manipulated the vote, and dominated the parliament. The peasant and the worker was nowhere. Such was the Free England of the 19th century. Did all these things unfit the people of England for Democracy? History has recorded the answer.

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CANADA.

Canada was again an exact proto-type of United States of

America. The complications of the Anglo Saxon and French racial differences were as serious, if not more serious, than the Hindu Moslem troubles in India. This problem was ruinous to the best interests of the country in all its aspects. The constitution granted by Great Britain to Canada in 1791 tended only to estrange the two races all the more, as water tight compartments and "divide and rule" recipes could not tend to national welfare. Even two percent of the population of Canada was not literate and all other drawbacks of American life were also present and yet Canada was considered fit for Self Government in 1848 and Dominion Status in 1867. Lord Durham prescribed self-rule as the panacea for all its miseries and it proved efficacious.

Miracle of Self Government.

After the attainment of self government, almost all the drawbacks of the people disappeared and Canadians began to prosper. The history of the country fully illustrates the saying that "self government is the free and unfettered privilege of the people to commit mistakes in their own house." After sixty years of self rule, Canada has not yet been free from the drawbacks of democracy. A perusal of the working of democracy there will make British politicians who interest themselves in India wince and say that if a Simon Commission were sent to Canada now it would pronounce that Canada is now as unfit for Swaraj as India is and that if it were possible the dominion constitution shall be withdrawn immediately and the Minto-Morley scheme be introduced there forthwith after calling three Round Table Conferences. Another lessson that we can learn from the working of the Canadian self Government is that the scheme of an All India Federation with safeguards and reservations promises to embody almost all the evils of the Canadian constitution without its merits. A few extracts from the famous work on Canada by Alexander Brady will show the truth of the above statement.

Office Seeking.

" The parliamentary institutions of Canada are largely an adaptation of the British, as the federal institutions are partly an adaptation from America. The effect of fede-

Able men may be passed over solely on regional considerations. This made Macdonald regret in 1888 and say the time has come to choose men for their qualifications rather than for their locality. This convention however could not be avoided Business life offers to men of ability glittering prizes and in a country of immense distances, politics and business could not readily be combined. There are few politicians who devote their whole time and talents to public life. Many look to Parliament as mainly a stepping stone to a Judgeship, a commissionership or some other permanent and remunerative job. To the rank and file of the private members at Ottawa, Parliament is little more than a social club, involving residence in a handsome capital, state balls, dinners with His Excelleney, social functions of every variety and an illusion of power. Serious grappling with economic and social problems is left to a minority.

Advancing Local Interests.

By far the larger number of M. P's. are residents of their constituencies and their primary task is that of advancing the interests of their localities. They are overburdened with requests from constituents for jobs under the Government from clerkships to Judgehips, intercessions for protection to particular industries, adjustment of financial matters arising out of disputes over customs duties on direct taxes etc. They therefore find little time or inclination to think about state problems.

Defects Of Democracy.

The electoral organisation again has defects common to most Anglo Saxon democracies. The country is arbitrarily divided into over 240 single-member constituencies (for the Federal House) which often lack civic cohesion, existing merely for parliamentary elections. It is supposed that the successful candidate, whatever percentage of votes he might obtain, can speak for all the citizens in the constituency. Thus well known results follow when a candidate defeats two others; he represents only the group which has elected him leaving the two minorities which together might make a majority. Disproportion in the size of the constituencies is another evil. Advocates of proportional representation seek

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difficulty in reconciling politics to the hetrogenous interests within the dominion. There are other influences more penetrating than the electoral system affecting the efficiency of the Government. The character of the civil service (the permanent administrators) is a contrast to the efficient and impartial British services.

Party Patronage.

Patronage by the party successful at the polls led to recruiting of allsorts of men. Attempts to put it on competitive examination basis has lessened the evils. Still there are many appoinments open to patronage. Political patronage extends to granting of contracts. This has proved to be the greatest of the unnecessary costs of the Canadian administration. At each general election money spent and the work performed may bring no commensurate material return. Throughout the dominion are scattered numerous reminders of an unsavoury patronage, branch railways which never had economic traffic or never will have, gaunt public elevators with negligible quantities of grain passing through, mouldering wharves and piers lonely, for want of visiting ships, Post office buildings beyond the need of the community served.

Bye-elections and Patronage.

In important bye-elections the government uses its control over patronage by making promises of money to be spent in local projects. In the event of their success at least a few of the promises must be fulfilled. Misuse of patronage brings other evils than that of extravagant expenditure. Members of parliament spend three quarters of their time on matters of patronage to the injury of other parliamentary work. The situation has improved with the recognition of the merit system in the Civil Service As early as 1890 the Canadian House of Commons had to pass a resolution saying that in expenditure of public money the public interest and not party favouritism should control.

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But it is vain to expect the reproduction of political virtues which grow out of social and other conditions non-existent in America. It is more probable that the American republic is more suited to the Canadian."

Australia.

The story of Australia is more interesting. The majority of the early settlers in that country were convicts deported from the Mother Country, England. Some of them were irreclaimable criminals. Some escaped from Society and became highway men and gangsters and troubled their weaker brethren by pillage. The aborigines were corrupted by their contact. Venereals, small pox and other contagions aswell as the drink evil and other bad habits spread very soon. Liquor trade flourished and along with it prositution and all the consequent vices. In 1833 out of a population of 60794, 16157 were convicts. Australians began to desire self government. The constitution of 1812 stimulated the desire for self rule, aud people began to improve. The country developed wonderfully after the attainment of Dominion Status.

In South Africa. The English and the Dutch belonged to two races and civilisations, spoke two languges; slavery and Indentured labour degraded the human instincts of the planters. Most of them were cruel, ignorant and loved pleasure. They were not even clean. They were boorish and primitive, and yet they were given self rule and Dominion Status which has changed the country and its people very soon, into a first rate modern state.

Ireland

The case of Ireland is very significant. As long as Ireland was under the despotic rule of England the two sects of Christians were at each other's throats. All development and progress was practically impossible. All jobs were given to Britishers and their henchmen. Industries would not thrive. Education did not progress sufficeintly. After the country became self governing in 1922, a decade of rule even by its moderates has improved matters. An idea can be had when

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Wilkinson wrote that the people of Canada got a better Government than they deserved." The high overhead cost of Canadian Government is due to federalism. In addition to the federal Government there are nine miniature parliaments, formal representatives of the King and administrative departments. Canadian city government often fails where that of Great Britain so frequently succeeds in attracting to office the best of its citizens. Canadian constitution is the prototype of British constitution but it lacks its distinctive merits in many cases.

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